

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BLANTYRE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8444

INFO AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

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SUBJECT: LETTER IN REPLY TO INQUIRIES CONCERNING JEHOVAH'S
WITNESSES

UNLESS DEPT SEES OBJECTION WE PLAN SEND FOLLOWING LETTER NEXT
WEEK IN REPLY TO SOME 100 INQUIRIES WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE
US CONCERNING ALLEGED MISTREATMENT OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES
IN THIS COUNTRY.

QUOTE: I HAVE RECEIVED YOUR RECENT LETTER EXPRESSING
CONCERN FOR THE STATUS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN MALAWI AND
CALLING MY ATTENTION TO REPORTS OF ATROCITIES AGAINST THEM.

A YOU MAY KNOW THE WITNESSES HAVE FACED DIFFICULTIES IN
MANY AFRICAN AND ARAB STATES, INCLUDING MALAWI'S NEIGHBORS
OF MOZAMBIQUE, ZAMBIA AND TANZANIA, FOR THEIR ALLEGED REFUSAL
TO ASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH THE GOVERNMENTS IN THE COUNTRIES
WHERE THEY RESIDE. THIS HAS PROVED A HIGHLY SENSITIVE POINT
TO THE LEADERS OF THESE DEVELOPING NATIONS AND IS OFTEN
REGARDED BY THEM AS A SIGN OF DISRESPECT OR SUBVERSION.

IN MALAWI THE WITNESSES WERE LEGALLY BANNED IN 1967,
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AND LEGAL SANCTIONS, INCLUDING PRISON SENTENCES, HAVE BEEN

IMPOSED AGAINST THOSE WHO ADMIT THEIR MEMBERSHIP IN THIS DENOMINATION. THE WITNESSES HAVE CONTINUED THEIR EFFORTS SINCE 1967 IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEIR EXISTENCE AS A DENOMINATION IS ILLEGAL UNDER MALAWI LAW.

THE RECORD SUGGESTS THAT MALAWI GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO STOP THE ACTIVITIES OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES HAVE BECOME MORE SEVERE AND DETERMINED SINCE 1967. WITNESSES HAVE AT TIMES BEEN SUBJECTED TO FORMS OF PRESSURE WHICH ARE COMPLETELY CONTRARY TO THE AMERICAN BELIEF IN RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE. HOWEVER WE HAVE NEITHER DEVELOPED NOR RECEIVED INFORMATION TO CONFIRM THE ALLEGATIONS OF RECENT ATROCITIES YOU HAVE NOTED.

WHILE WE ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT CHARGES OF PERSECUTIONS

IN MALAWI, IT HAS BEEN OUR CONSIDERED JUDGMENT THAT ANY FORMAL REPRESENTATIONS BY THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOT IMPROVE PROSPECTS FOR WITNESSES IN MALAWI. WE HAVE, NEVERTHELESS, BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE MALAWI MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS THE CONCERN EXPRESSED BY AMERICAN CITIZENS, SUCH AS YOURSELF, ABOUT THE REPORTS AND CURRENT STATUS OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES. THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE HAS SIMILARLY REGISTERED ITS CONCERN ABOUT THESE REPORTS WITH THE MALAWIAN AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

GIVEN THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CHARACTER OF THE PROBLEM WE SUGGEST THAT THE UNITED NATIONS OR A SIMILAR INTERNATIONAL BODY IS BETTER SUITED THAN THE UNITED STATES TO TAKE UP YOUR QUESTIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI AND YOU MAY THEREFORE WISH TO CONTACT THE UNITED NATIONS CONCERNING THIS MATTER. YOU MAY ALSO WANT TO WRITE DIRECTLY TO THE HONORABLE JACOB T. X. MUWAMBA, AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI, 2362 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20003, ABOUT THE STATUS OF THE WITNESSES IN MALAWI. MEANWHILE YOU MAY BE SURE THAT WE WILL BE ALERT FOR ANY OPPORTUNITIES TO FURTHER A SPIRIT OF COMPASSION AND HUMANITY IN THIS SITUATION. UNQUOTE
STEVENSON

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